

The Ockendon School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	115216
Local Authority	THURROCK LA
Inspection number	311880
Inspection date	27 September 2007
Reporting inspector	John Godwood

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Type of school	Comprehensive
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	863
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Rev Brian Duckworth
Headteacher	Mrs Barbara King
Date of previous school inspection	1 November 2004
School address	Erriff Drive South Ockendon Essex RM15 5AY
Telephone number	01708 851661
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Age group	11-16
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by an Additional Inspector. The inspector evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated the following issues: the impact of specialist status on students' achievement, the consistency of teaching and learning, support for individual students, and leadership and management at all levels. Evidence was gathered from observations of lessons and students' work; discussions with the headteacher, senior staff, governors and students; parents' questionnaires and the school's self-evaluation documents. Other aspects of the school's work were not investigated in detail, but the inspector found no evidence to suggest that the school's own assessments, as given its self-evaluation, were not justified, and these have been included where appropriate in this report.

Description of the school

The school is smaller than average, but is oversubscribed and is increasing in size. It is currently in the middle of a new building programme. The school serves an area with some social disadvantage and the proportion of students eligible for free school meals is above average. The percentage of students with learning difficulties or disabilities is above average, as is the percentage who have a statement of special educational need. The proportion of students from minority ethnic backgrounds or who speak English as an additional language is below average.

The school is a specialist college for mathematics and computing. It has the Healthy Schools Award, Investors in People and the Basic Skills Quality Mark.

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

This is an outstanding school. The headteacher and staff have a very strong commitment to the principle that everyone can succeed; they continually check how well things are going and bring in new ideas to keep improving all aspects of the school. As a result, it is a school where students and staff are supportive of each other and thoroughly enjoy their work. The building is bright, welcoming and inspiring. Students grow into responsible young people and make outstanding progress in their work. Most parents are very pleased with the school, one commenting typically that, 'Over the years, the school has gone from strength to strength.'

When students join the school in Year 7, their attainment is, overall, below average. A significant number have poor literacy skills. Students make good progress through Years 7 to 9, although standards at the end of Year 9 are still below average. By the time they leave in Year 11, however, they achieve above average GCSE results. This is outstanding achievement. There has been a sharp rise in GCSE results in recent years. Students' progress has been maintained at an outstanding level for the past four years. All groups of students make equally good progress, including those with learning difficulties or disabilities. The school's status as a mathematics and computing college has had a positive impact on standards. Students make outstanding progress in mathematics and English, and their achievements in information and communication technology (ICT) add significantly to their overall results. While students make at least good progress in almost all subjects, there is some variation in subject performance. The school sets itself very challenging targets and has met some but not all of these.

Students' achievement is the result of teaching that is outstanding because of its consistently high quality. Senior staff have a very good knowledge of the quality of teaching throughout the school and provide weekly opportunities for teachers to train and share good practice. As a result, teachers have a clear understanding of how to plan and organise a good lesson that has a clear purpose and engages students actively. They have high expectations of themselves and their students. Students arrive at each lesson expecting to work hard and to learn. They know where they stand because behaviour is managed consistently and is well supported by senior staff. Lessons are orderly and constructive. Teachers encourage students to think for themselves through questions and, in the best lessons, through thoughtful discussion and debate. Students respond to this well. Their attitudes and relationships with staff are good. They very much enjoy the school's positive and supportive atmosphere. They find most lessons interesting and can see that they are making progress. Teachers provide regular feedback and targets for improvement; in the best lessons students have an excellent understanding of how well they are doing and are genuine partners in their learning.

Students are ready to learn because of outstanding care, guidance and support. Students feel that the school is safe and all have an identified adult to turn to if they need support. There is extensive and well organised extra help for students with particular needs. The school invests heavily in support staff, who play a crucial role in this alongside teachers. For example, the 'team around the child' provides carefully planned support for students with emotional or behavioural difficulties. An additional literacy programme supports a significant number of students in Years 7 and 8. Students with learning difficulties or disabilities are well supported and their progress is closely monitored. Attendance is checked and encouraged rigorously. Communication with parents is a high priority and is promoted actively by the 'team around the child'. The school has excellent links with other agencies to promote students' well-being and provide specialist support. The quality of support is enhanced because the school regularly

measures its effectiveness and is imaginative in planning improvements. Well managed transition from primary schools enables students to settle quickly. All students have high quality academic guidance. Their achievements are assessed six times a year and reported to parents. Heads of year monitor their students' progress, meet them regularly and provide additional support where necessary. Students have clear personal targets in their planners and two opportunities a year to discuss these with their tutors and parents. Every Year 11 student has a business mentor who supports their personal study.

Students' personal development and well-being are good, and in some respects outstanding. The school provides an environment that is well ordered, inspiring and supportive, encapsulated in its motto, 'be the best you can be'. Students respond very well and their enjoyment of school is outstanding. They relate well to one another; in the mixed age tutor groups, older and younger students listen respectfully to each other and discuss issues sensibly. Behaviour is consistently good. Students are adamant that bullying is extremely rare because if it does begin they know exactly what to do and it is dealt with quickly; their understanding of how to stay safe is excellent. They also have a good understanding of how to keep themselves healthy, encouraged by the healthy food on sale in school and high participation in many sports. Attendance is satisfactory. Most students attend very regularly, but there is a small proportion whose attendance is low despite the school's best efforts. However, the school's rigorous procedures and encouragement ensure that unauthorised absence is low and have led to significant improvements in some students' attendance. Students feel that the school listens to their views and they make a good contribution to the school and wider community through taking on responsibilities and through the current election process that is leading to a revitalised school council. They are well prepared for their future working lives through their good basic skills, work experience and the school's business links. Through its high expectations and high quality provision, the school is very effective in raising students' belief in themselves and others, leading to outstanding spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

The school provides a good range of courses and other activities. Literacy and numeracy are supported well. Through its specialist status in mathematics and computing, students get a good grounding in ICT and learn how to use it across many subjects. Personal, social and health education is very effective. Activities outside the classroom add significantly to students' enjoyment and general education. The personal learning programme runs every day after school, offering a wide range of well attended activities. These include study support, many sports, and clubs such as the environmental team, which cares for the school's chickens and geese, and the car club, in which students build and race an eco-friendly car. Students' horizons are widened further through residential trips. In Years 10 and 11, students have a good range of options, including some vocational courses that have contributed significantly to their achievement. However, students are not entirely satisfied that their interests and aspirations are fully catered for and the school is working with other local schools to plan the introduction of a wider range of vocational courses.

The school's effectiveness is due to outstanding leadership and management. The headteacher guides the school with vision and unshakeable optimism. The whole leadership team and the staff share enthusiasm for their work and a passion to improve students' life chances. This is the spirit of the school. Leadership is characterised by a drive for continual improvement and uses challenging targets very effectively to raise standards. Staff are self-critical and continually check every aspect of the school's work to identify areas for improvement. For example, teachers evaluate the quality of every lesson they teach and the results are monitored weekly. Subject leaders regularly check the work in their departments, through visiting lessons and checking

students' work. They report regularly to the leadership team, who keep a close eye on all aspects of school life. Parents' views are sought twice a year. New initiatives are evaluated rigorously to check how well they are working.

The school introduces new developments with imagination, energy and purpose. These include developments to the building, new courses, opportunities to promote personal development and new ways to support students' individual needs. The headteacher is successful in raising additional funds and in appointing new staff to drive specific initiatives. Students appreciate that it is an improving school. The school is very well organised, so that students and staff alike know what is expected and consistent standards are maintained throughout. Displays around the school promote the positive ethos. The school's systems promote personal responsibility so that, for example, there are no bells at the ends of lessons. The governors support the school well and strengthen its links with the community. They know the school well and play a significant role in guiding its development.

The school has kept up a very strong rate of improvement since its last inspection. This track record, together with the rigorous self-evaluation at all levels, show that it has outstanding capacity to improve further. It gives outstanding value for money.

What the school should do to improve further

- Broaden the range of vocational courses to ensure that all students can follow courses that meet their interests and aspirations.

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Annex A

Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	School Overall
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Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	1
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	1
The standards ¹ reached by learners	2
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	1
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	1

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1
How well learners enjoy their education	1
The attendance of learners	3
The behaviour of learners	2
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	2
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	1
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1

¹ Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average to below average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

Annex A

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	1
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	1
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	1
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	1
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	1
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

28 September 2007

Dear Students

Inspection of The Ockendon School, South Ockendon RM15 5AY

I much enjoyed visiting your school and meeting some of you in your lessons and around the school. Thank you for your help and for sharing your views with me.

Some of you told me that you very much enjoy school because it feels safe, people get on well together and most of your lessons are interesting. I was impressed by your good behaviour, your helpfulness to visitors and the way older and younger students work together in the tutor groups. Most of you attend very regularly, but there is a minority whose attendance is too low, despite the school's best efforts.

Overall, you make outstanding progress and achieve above average GCSE results. This is due to the hard work of you and your teachers. The teaching is of consistently high quality, so that you expect to learn a lot in every lesson. Your teachers give you good feedback so that you know what you need to do to reach your targets. The school also provides outstanding support for individual students, including those who need extra help with literacy skills or who have particular needs and problems.

Several of you told me you think it is an excellent school and I agree. Your headteacher and all the staff believe firmly that everyone can succeed and work extremely hard to make that happen. They constantly check how well things are going and bring in good new ideas to keep improving things. Becoming a maths and computing college is just one example. You have a good range of courses and other activities, but some of you would like more choices in Years 10 and 11. I have asked the school to consider introducing a wider range of vocational courses.

The school has improved rapidly over recent years and I am very confident that it will continue to improve. You can help by continuing the excellent partnership you have with your teachers in order to 'be the best you can be', and particularly by making sure that you attend regularly.

I wish you well for the future.

Yours sincerely

John Godwood

Lead inspector